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AUTHOR Wilcox, Wilma B.
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated changes in the speech patterns of Japanese college students in an intensive English language course when using a microphone, focusing in part on possible links to "karaoke" activities common in Japan, in which participants sing along with music using a microphone. The researcher first observed several karaoke parties in which selections were sung in both English and Japanese. Later, in a classroom context, university students in advanced English classes were videotaped in English debates using microphones, and students were then surveyed using both a Likert scale and interviews (without microphone) about public speaking and microphone use. It is suggested that microphone use helps students overcome shyness and enjoy public speaking, gives the speaker control of the floor and of turn-taking expectations, increases self-confidence, and may assist in the speaker's self-monitoring. It is also concluded that the karaoke style carries over into the classroom in this situation. (Contains 20 references.) (MSE)

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Wilma B. Wilcox, Ph.D., Southern Illinois University in Niigata, Japan
439-1 Oaza Nagahashi-kami, Nakajo 959-2637 Niigata, Japan
phone 0254-43-6200 fax 0254-43-6206 email wwilcox@siu.edu

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MICROPHONE PHENOMENA OBSERVED WITH EFL STUDENTS

This study is a qualitative research designed to observe Japanese students' speaking patterns in an Intensive English Program at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in Niigata, Japan. This IEP has 120 students in eight levels, leading to a liberal arts two year program at SIUC-N, then transferring to Carbondale, Illinois, to complete the remainder of the four-year program in liberal arts or other majors. A convenience pilot sample of ten percent of the students was selected. This is a small sample but the information is encouraging.

At the 101 and 102 levels, speaking classes use a variety of communicative techniques. Taped assignments show interesting changes when a microphone is used. Students become more focused, clear voiced, and seem to take on an American style persona. Students present a storyboard gallery standing presentation for a moving audience of other students and faculty. Even without the microphone, they assume the microphone persona and speak to their audience with clear, directed speech. This voice projection pattern serves to clarify speech with more open-mouthed voicing of consonants.

At 201 and 202 levels, classroom readings, talk show skits and role play activities elicit similar observations. Microphones are used in listening labs, as well as simulation activities with and without the microphone. At 301 and 302 levels, debate techniques are used on stage with a microphone. Higher levels of 401 and 402 continue with actual classroom presentations, with and without a microphone, videotaped.

This researcher feels there is a notable change in behavior when the microphone is used. There is a possible correlation with *karaoke* activities in Japan. The research questions are:

1. Does the use of a microphone increase the clarity of the student speech?
2. Does the expectation of a public performance increase the clarity of speech?
3. Can the microphone phenomena be observed even when a microphone is not being used?
4. Does the use of the microphone assure turn-taking and possession of the speech stream?
5. Does the use of the microphone increase the power of the speaker?
6. Do students who enjoy *karaoke* also enjoy using a microphone?

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INTRODUCTION

The standard definition of a microphone is "a device used to transform sound energy into electrical energy." (Encarta CD-ROM) Microphones, invented by American Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, are important in many parts of our public life, but do not seem to be used specifically for speech production enhancement for ESOL or EFL students in their study of English. Used in telephone conversation role-play situations, the voice seems to be directed more clearly to the receiving speaker even when the telephone microphone is only simulated. Normally used to amplify sound, one would expect a microphone to make soft voices easier to hear in the classroom situation. In public appearances and on television, many speakers wear small button-type microphones to make their speech more audible for large audiences. Other microphones are used by the general public in the form of hearing aids. In this study, the microphone phenomenon will be investigated as it could actually be applied in the classroom situation, but it will also be investigated as a simulated/psychological enhancement to pronounciation clarity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Some of the most interesting literature deals with the Japanese entertainment known as *karaoke*. This phenomenon has traveled from Japan to the rest of the world and is popular in bars and clubs in many parts of the U.S., Europe, Asia and even parts of South America. Asian Business, a magazine from Hong Kong, reported in 1990:

> "Like the Japanese investments, *karaoke* is on the march. Singers are howling in Hong Kong, trilling in Thailand, moaning in Malaysia and intoning in Indonesia." (Bartu, 176).

This is sometimes surprising when the Japanese are considered shy, soft-spoken, and reluctant to speak out in ESOL classrooms. *Karaoke* is made up of two words: *kara* meaning empty or vacant and *oke* from the word orchestra. The concept includes words projected on a screen to be sung by anyone with the microphone. Bartu said, "Singing together seems to make people feel close to each other and nobody is too inhibited to grasp the microphone....desire to be famous, to be a star." (Bartu, 177-181).

In a case of a school bus trip, the microphone was seized enthusiastically to transform the student into the role of a famous singer:

> "Finally the guide gave in and offered the microphone to the class. A buoyant boy with a devious grin sprang from the back of the bus to seize the proffered prize....he handed her a cassette tape. Without missing a beat the boy stood atop the purple velour seats of the bus, bowed to the cheers of his rowdy classmates, and began to sing along--'Here I am in par-a-

> dise.' Welcome to junior *karaoke*, the teenage mutant version of the adult drinking game." (Feiler, 265)

This enthusiasm for using a microphone can be chaneled into classroom microphone activities to encourage speech production in a variety of ways. Role play activities have been used in second language acquisition classes as a way to become the speaker in a pretend situation thereby releasing the speaker of normal cultural constraints on behaviors.

Wingate investigates multiple intelligences and encourages teachers to help identify students' learning styles. The microphone appears to involve bodily or kinesthetic intelligence as well as linguistic intelligence and musical intelligence. "I need to practise a new skill by doing it rather than simply reading about it or seeing a video that describes it." (Wingate, 29) In language learning, "doing the language" translates to speaking in a variety of situations.

Murphey and Bolstad promote the idea of educational hypnosis with the idea of believing "You can do it!" They say that teachers can shift their focus from "discomfort and self-doubt to more confident and proactive images and outcomes." (Murphey and Bolstad, 9). In this situation empowerment could come from the use of the microphone. The microphone is a powerful symbol of the rock star persona.

Britten states that language learners "want to be freed from deeply ingrained habits: reticence, embarrassment, and fear of failure." He says that "English language students in Japan have mastered steps, but never have a chance to dance to the music." (Britten, 6) He uses the rhyme of dance with chance (*chansu ga nai*) to go with the current movie "Shall We Dance?" *Chansu ga nai* is a phrase meaning "no chance for me to practice." So in asking, "Shall we *chansu* ?" he is saying "Shall we chance?" meaning to take a chance or risk in practicing language. However his focus is on using Walkman-style tape players, close-captioned English videos, and short-wave radio shows. In short, he too is aware of the use of the microphone in our lives and thereby the need to use it to enhance language learning in any way possible. Taking a chance by using these microphones from the media may be one way to further involve students in their language learning.

Lakoff (1990) describes men's language as the language of the powerful. "It is meant to be direct, clear, succinct, as would be expected of those who need not fear giving offence...the language of people who are in charge in the real world." (Lakoff, 205). The microphone is often thought of as a phallic symbol and a symbol of power. English language study in Japan is often

pursued to increase business and international power. The empowerment of the microphone could be used to promote a clear, direct, English-culture style of speaking.

According to Pinker, amplification and filtering produce different combinations of sounds that we hear as different vowels. The brain interprets the different patterns of amplification and filtering as different vowels. The resonant cavity in the vocal areas of the mouth and larynx further amplify some frequencies. (Pinker, 166-167) He further states that speech perception is strongly driven by acoustics. (Pinker, 185) Therefore, if mechanical amplification through microphone use can assist otherwise soft-voiced or shy speakers, then it can be used to aid language learning and pronunciation clarity.

DIRECT OBSERVATIONS OF *KARAOKE*

On Oct. 26, 1997, Halloween *karaoke* presentations at SIUC-N festivities were in both English and Japanese. Students organized this *karaoke* singing contest and students signed up to sing in duet or solo performance. Self-selected songs, in either English or Japanese, or the selection of some songs, which were a mixture of Japanese and English, made this a bilingual speech event. This was a rented *karaoke* system and students seemed eager to participate. Students reported that the microphone made them "feel good and powerful, but they were nervous too."

On Oct. 29, 1997, International Rotary club members had a second party at La Foret in Nakajo, a local *karaoke* club. This *karaoke* party followed a drinking party dinner meeting and appeared to be the natural conclusion to the evening. It will be assumed that the alcohol lowered inhibitions and these adult Japanese males were eager to sing and demonstrate their English skills to this researcher. The most popular song was "More." Songs by the Beattles and Elvis Presley seemed to be the most popular with this group in Japan. *Enka*, Japanese love songs, were also a part of the evening *karaoke* selections. The microphone was passed eagerly from one person to another so each could have two or three turns to sing.

On Nov. 8, 1997, a Toyosaka *karaoke* presentation for Joy English Club focused on two English songs: Autumn Leaves and Top of the World. This was a video *karaoke* presentation used with a standard VCR and a microphone. This researcher used a microphone to teach the words of the song in a drill-and-practice pronunciation exercise to an audience of twenty-two Japanese adults who are members of an English club in the village of Toyosaka in Japan called the Joy English Club. Then, these club members each volunteered to come to the microphone to sing one of the two

songs solo or in duet. This researcher was amazed at the singing clarity as compared to their otherwise soft-speaking voices in English. They were learning English by singing and the microphone gave them the psychological power of a performing star or stage personality.

On November 21, 1997, classroom debates for the 401 level were videotaped using a microphone which was on a moveable boom. The instructor served as moderator and used a cordless microphone. The debate topic was: "Resolved: Japanese doctors should be allowed to assist in suicide." The debate teams were lively, clear voiced and actively promoting their arguments in western cultural tradition. The advantages of the microphone appeared to be amplification, focused voice, turn-taking, expectation of speaking, allowing others to focus clearly on the speaker, and power in speaking manner.

On December 11, 1997, classroom debates for the 401 level were videotaped showing turn-taking and clear, strong voices. The debate topic was "Resolved: Japanese high school classes should include a debate class."

PILOT PROJECT

A pilot project involved student responses after the debates, using a Likert scale to measure attitudes and eliciting comments about microphone usage. This was a 401 debate class with thirteen members. The 401 level is an upper level advanced speaking class. Each student had an assigned role in the debate with researched arguments to defend the position in the affirmative or the negative.

THE INSTRUMENT

Male _____ Female _____
Class Level 401
RD/SP Debate class Fall 97

Circle 1 not at all, 2 no, 3 some, 4 yes, 5 very much.

1. Did you enjoy public speaking?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Did you enjoy using a microphone?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Do you think it made your voice clearer?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Do you think it made your voice louder?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Did you feel more powerful using a microphone?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Do you often use a microphone for karaoke?	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

RESULTS

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Comments
M1	3	3	1	2	3	3	I was happy because many students and teacher came to our debate.
M2	5	4	4	4	4	5	
M3	3	4	4	4	2	3	I think we need more microphones.
M4	3	2	3	4	4	4	
M5	5	4	4	5	1	4	Microphones are OK. Don't worry.
M6	5	1	2	1	1	5	I hate a microphone, when I talk something. My voice is loud, so I don't need it.
F1	4	5	4	5	2	4	
F2	5	4	4	4	4	4	I sat near speaker, so my ears were uncomfortable.
F3	5	4	4	4	3	5	I like yesterday's microphone because it didn't make my voice lower.
F4	4	4	4	5	5	3	
F5	4	3	4	5	5	5	
F6	5	5	4	5	4	4	
F7	4	4	4	4	3	5	
Avg.	4.23	3.62	3.54	4.00	3.15	4.15	
N=13							
St.Dev.	0.83	1.12	0.97	1.22	1.34	0.8	
AvgAvg.	3.78						
Mavg.	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.33	2.50	4.00	
Favg.	4.43	4.14	4.00	4.57	3.71	4.29	

CONCLUSIONS

The microphone is macho, phallic, and power enhancing. Its use can be justified for psychological, sociological, physical, and technological reasons. In so far as it gives the student power to overcome shyness and shift attitudes toward enjoyment of public speaking, the speech production skills can be enhanced. The microphone also gives the speaker control of the floor and turn-taking expectation levels. Increased self-confidence and respect can be observed. The physical benefits of increased loudness and clarity through amplification may also assist the speaker in self-monitoring his own speech patterns by hearing them better. The physical aspects of using a microphone with a tape recorder will also permit the student playback self-evaluation aimed at self-improvement of communication clarity. As technology increases, more microphones are being added to everyday life in the mode of telephones, cassette recorders, video recorders, security speaker systems, computer microphones and the various portable *karaoke* systems.

This researcher believes in the carry-over phenomena of simulated microphone psychology in role playing and public speaking events. Continued observations will monitor classroom use of microphone and the microphone phenomena as it affects speech production of Japanese students learning English in a university intensive English program.

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